



## Monitoring Change in AONBs

Notes of a facilitated discussion with Professor Robert Tregay of LDA Design

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at 10.00 am in the Function Room at the County Arms, Truro

### Present:

Professor Robert Tregay	LDA Design (facilitator)
Lyndis Cole	Director, Land Use Consultants
Sarah Manning	Natural England
Andrew Baker	Natural England
Jeremy Clithero	Natural England
Corine Dyke	North Cornwall District Council
John Rudge	North Cornwall District Council
June Crossland	Planning Consultant
Louise Graham	Isles of Scilly AONB
Rosemary Teverson	Tamar Valley AONB
Fay Wilkins	Plymouth University PhD Student working with Tamar Valley AONB
Paul Walton	Cornwall AONB
Colette Holden	Cornwall AONB
Karen Johns	Cornwall AONB (to take minutes)

### SUMMARY

#### Edited from a summary letter to the Cornwall AONB Unit from Professor Robert Tregay - LDA Design 12.03.07

The group was convened discussed the requirements of landscape monitoring for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and ways to approach this work so that relevant, meaningful and practical indicators of change could be developed. During the day the discussion was widened to incorporate how this work could be useful for the development and review of AONB Management Plans and the integration of these plans with planning policy.

The starting point must be the legislation relating to AONB's and the term '**Natural Beauty**'. It is the Outstanding Natural Beauty of the AONB's which must be the driving force behind work on management plan review, monitoring and planning policy. Although landscape character is part of the answer, the landscape character approach may not adequately support the AONB designation as it is a quality rather than character designation and also because planners and others still struggle to transfer LCA's into policy.

#### **Criteria Underpinning Designation for Natural Beauty**

The next step is to define what it is in the landscape that makes up natural beauty.

The Countryside Commission publication, 'Landscape Assessment Guidance' (1993), also provides guidance on evaluating landscapes for designation. Whilst scenic quality will be the

overriding factor in designation, the following six criteria are recommended for evaluating landscapes for designation:-

- i. *Landscape as a resource* - The landscape should be a resource of at least national (regional, county, local) importance for reasons of rarity or representativeness.
- ii. *Scenic quality* - It should be of high scenic quality, with pleasing patterns and combinations of landscape features, and important aesthetic or intangible factors.
- iii. *Unspoilt character* - The landscape within the area generally should be unspoilt by large-scale, visually intrusive industry, mineral extraction or other inharmonious development.
- iv. *Sense of place* - It should have a distinctive and common character, including topographic and visual unity and a clear sense of place.
- v. *Conservation interests* - In addition to its scenic qualities, it should include other notable conservation interests, such as features of historical wildlife or architectural interest.
- vi. *Consensus* - There should be a consensus of both professional and public opinion as to its importance, for example as reflected through writings and paintings about the landscape.

These criteria are drawn through into the Countryside Agency's 2000 Guidance on Landscape Character Assessment as follows...

- landscape quality: the intactness of the landscape and the condition of features and elements (para 7.8);
- scenic quality: the term that is used to describe landscapes which appeal primarily to the visual senses;
- rarity: the presence of rare features and elements in the landscape, or the presence of a rare landscape character type;
- representativeness: whether the landscape contains a particular character, and/or features and elements, which is felt by stakeholders to be worthy of representing;
- conservation interests: the presence of features of particular wildlife, earth science or archaeological, historical and cultural interest can add to the value of a landscape as well as having value in their own right;

- wildness: the presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place;
- associations with particular people, artists, writers, or other media, or events in history.

“There may often be a consensus of opinion about the value of an area encompassing one or more of these criteria, which can be traced over time from the views expressed by different stakeholders”

These criteria mean that natural beauty is not purely a personal, subjective issue; it can be professionally evaluated, with public input and can be monitored with the use of an appropriate evidence base. They can be used to justify, explain, test and maintain natural beauty through the management plan process and planning policy.

### **Evidence base**

It is necessary to have an evidence base which can provide information as a whole and in particular areas of the AONB and in particular areas of the AONB which makes up Natural Beauty. Landscape Character Assessments can make up part of this evidence base but it is important that they are used properly to pick out evidence in terms of what is ‘outstanding natural beauty’, rather than simply using the LCA to obtain a description of what is there. Other documents which may form part of the evidence base are the AONB management plans themselves, the older Countryside Commission AONB landscape assessments and other sources of information drawn from Natural England and English Heritage etc.

People sometimes express concern that non-quantitative source of information do not carry sufficient weight although this is not the case. Subjective information can carry as much weight as objective information. People are often uncomfortable placing importance on aesthetic and sensory factors but these qualities are a vital part of our understanding of natural beauty and landscape, both of which are essentially human concepts.

### **Identification of attributes**

The next stage is to identify what is in each AONB which contribute to the criteria described above. Examples might be a Cornish Hedge, cohesive moorland character, visible archaeological remains, sense of wildness, traditional architectural interest, richness of wildlife, exceptionally clear water or air, domestic landscape character with hedgerows, undeveloped or unenclosed etc. **these are very special features when taken together make up natural beauty and thus tie the elements of the landscape into the legal basis for the AONB designation.**

### **Management Plans, Planning Policy and Monitoring**

By identifying the special features of the landscape, it should be possible to achieve a unified basis for integrating management and planning issues with links right back to the statutory basis for an AONB i.e. natural beauty. In following this argument indicators should not focus on elements such as public rights of way opened up to the public which, whilst of interest and importance, are not directly linked to the statutory basis for an AONB and are perhaps of second tier importance. It is important not to confuse aspects such as this with the primary purpose related to Natural Beauty. Planners need guidance from AONB specialists on how to formulate AONB policy and the best way of providing this is by tying policies to a sound evidence base and to the statutory basis underpinning AONB's, i.e. Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The primary attributes to monitor should also be those which clearly contribute towards Outstanding Natural Beauty. These should be clearly separated from secondary features of interest which, whilst they may be readily identifiable through existing sources of data capture, are not directly relevant to AONB

management and the primary purpose of the AONB designation. Some aspects of Appendix 3 of the Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans fall into this category e.g. Percentage of PRoW in good condition and Percentage of woodland under management for public benefit. The relevance of tranquillity will depend on the robustness of the method used to measure tranquillity and the Merrick case may now mean that the condition of historic parks and gardens cannot now be considered as a measure of Natural Beauty.

## **MORNING SESSION**

Robert Tregay welcomed the Group and introduced himself as facilitator of the discussion. He has a sound background of Cornwall and its landscape having been born and brought up in the County, writing 'The Cornish Landscape' 1997 document – 'An Assessment of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Cornwall' on behalf of the Countryside Commission, and working with the County Council's Historic Environment Service to produce the Historic Characterisation Map for Cornwall.

Colette Holden also welcomed the Group, explaining why she had convened the meeting.

### **Background**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000, local authorities were required to produce a Management Plan for all AONBs. Section 85 of the CRoW Act also placed a duty on all statutory authorities to have regard to AONBs when undertaking their day to day work.

### **The Cornwall, Tamar Valley and Isles of Scilly Landscape Monitoring Project 2007**

The Cornwall AONB Management Plan includes an action to measure and monitor landscape change. C Holden has responsibility within the AONB Unit for monitoring the AONB and a landscape monitoring project has been contracted to Land Use Consultants to look at ways of landscape monitoring in the Cornwall, Tamar Valley and Isles of Scilly AONBs. Land Use Consultants (LUC) will help develop a set of indicators which will be used to measure change. Natural England (formerly English Nature) has established a very sound biodiversity monitoring processes for SSSI and other nature conservation sites and C Holden would like to see similar processes developed for landscape change monitoring in protected landscapes.

The results of the project will be fed back to the SWPLF and NAAONB and Natural England– as far as the 3 AONB Units are aware this study will be unique among the protected landscapes monitoring being undertaken by AONBs, although more research needs to be done to determine that this is the case.

Lyndis Cole, Director of LUC who will be undertaking the joint project for the 3 AONBs, attended this meeting to gain more of an insight into what may be required prior to commencing work on the project. L Cole summarised what she felt the Group needed to consider during the day's discussions:-

- Reasons for the AONBs designation – the special qualities
- Key characteristics
- What changes are likely to happen – what qualities and characteristics will the changes impact upon and will it be a positive or negative effect on the landscape?
- Quality and Quantity – or both? (e.g. hedgebanks)
- Sharing landscape indicators i.e. choose indicators of change with multiple benefits
- Scale – character of the whole AONB versus specific to particular part of an AONB (use Landscape Description Units (LDUs from 2007 Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Landscape Character Study)

### **What is an AONB?**

The Group were reminded by RT that the *'primary purpose of an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape'*. AONBs have equal status to National Parks, but different legislation on the way they are both managed. One major difference is that 'recreational use' provision is not a requirement of an AONB as it is with a National Park.

### **Guidance for Review of AONB Management Plans**

The Guidance for Review of AONB Management Plans states that both performance and conditions monitoring is required and it is the condition monitoring aspect that is the focus for this discussion. A condition status is required e.g. changing; declining. The Group were referred to Appendix 3 of the Guidance for Review of AONB Management Plans. This is a list of common indicators produced following the CRoW Act 2000 and in line with the deadline for AONBs to produce Management Plans by 2004. The list of indicators is intended to provide commonality and consistency for all AONBs, but it is guidance so can be amended and developed by individual AONBs.

### **Different characteristics of each AONB**

What are the key contributors to natural beauty, and how can they be measured? For example, the Cornwall AONB is made up of 12 separate areas and each of those areas are so varied that they may each require a separate set of monitoring indicators.

For example, the Cornwall AONB landscape overall has the following key characteristics:

- the AONB is disparate
- special topography
- elemental quality
- historic landscapes – where interaction of people and nature over many hundreds of years has resulted in a landscape of diverse land use patterns
- cultural association which creates a sense of place – uniquely Cornish e.g. Cornish language; place names; traditions; legends; festivals from a deeply historic link between people and the landscape.

### **Scene setting**

During discussion, the Group agreed they wished to discuss the following issues further in order to adequately set the scene for a discussion on AONB monitoring:

- Countryside Quality Counts (Natural England initiative)
- Nature Conservation/Biodiversity Monitoring
- AONBs – definition of natural beauty
- Local Development Frameworks and LDF monitoring

It was also suggested that it is worth bearing in mind the possibility of linking to all indicators e.g. the Government set indicators that all Local Authorities etc need to monitor against across the whole County not just the AONB – so would it be possible/appropriate to link AONB indicators to all other indicators?

- **Countryside Quality Counts (CQC) - [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)**

Andrew Baker is the lead officer for this Natural England initiative and presented the CQC project to the group. CQC covers the whole of England not just AONBs. The Rural White Paper 2000 required an

indicator to be created to monitor Countryside Quality. The Initiative is concerned with historic features; biodiversity; tranquillity; and countryside/landscape character.

The CQC programme commenced in May 2002 and two assessments have been produced so far since it was introduced. CQC is used to report to DEFRA on outcome indicators.

CQC seeks to show:

- **where change is occurring** (and is split into 7 elements: woodland; boundary features; agricultural patterns; settlement and development; semi-natural habitats; historic features; coast and rivers).
- **does change matter?**

Two consultation exercises have taken place to look at what makes places special. The Joint Character Areas matrix have been used as a framework for CQC and the following matrix has been developed for each element to enable a condition status to be assigned to each JCA:

	<b>Consistent</b>	<b>Inconsistent</b>
<b>Stable</b>	Maintain	Neglect
<b>Changing</b>	Enhance	Degrading

The group held a brief discussion with AB regarding

- data availability
- local application of CQC and potential for data error?

- **Nature Conservation/Biodiversity Monitoring**

J Clithero briefed the Group on SSSI monitoring that has been developed and is undertaken by Natural England (formerly by English Nature) and the potential for application of the same principles to landscape monitoring. The overall objective of an SSSI is to 'maintain the site in favourable condition'. J Clithero referred to Appendix 3 in the Guidance for Review of Management Plans, clarifying that for biodiversity monitoring they have 'features' instead of 'attributes', and 'attributes' instead of 'indicators'.

J Clithero suggested that it is also necessary for the AONB to set 'targets' so these can also be monitored although this can only be achieved once a baseline is set.

- **AONBs – defining natural beauty**

The primary objective of an AONB is to maintain its natural beauty. The following key considerations for natural beauty were taken from paras. 7.21 and 7.22 of the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance 2002 produced by the Countryside Agency:

- flora, fauna, physiographical and geographical features
- landscape quality
- scenic quality
- representativeness/ rarity
- Conservation interests
- wildness
- associations

It will also be important when choosing indicators that to examine forces for change in order to ensure that we are measuring the element which may be subject to change.

The group briefly discussed the implications of the Merrick Estate case where a landowner had successfully argued that his land was not of sufficient/ adequate 'natural beauty' to merit inclusion in the designation.

The issue of finance was raised. Some things will not be able to be monitored as they are too big a scale or it may be too expensive to do so.

- **Local Development Framework (LDF) and LDF Monitoring**

The LDF includes a number of development plan documents, Area Actions Plans and the Annual Monitoring Report. The Annual Monitoring Report contains biodiversity and landscape indicators. From North Cornwall District Council's point of view it would be ideal to develop a set of indicators that could be used in the Annual Monitoring Report covering all aspects to be monitored.

Design Guides were mentioned. Some aspects may not be easily monitored but will at least be considered in Design Guides.

### **Discussion Session**

The meeting then went on to discuss broadly what should be taken into account when deciding on indicators of landscape change

- The AONB Management Plans and Landscape Character Study can be used as a starting point evidence base to consider key/special features (the finest nationally)
  - o Physical entities
  - o Culture of place
  - o Perceptual e.g. maintaining dark night skies (minimum light pollution)
  - o Health of the environment
- Appendix 3 of the Guide for Review of Management Plans – RT pointed out that this gives some but not enough 'sense of place' indicators
- Outstanding features etc at a national level – as defined by the criteria set out in the Countryside Commission 1993 Landscape Character Assessment Guidance and the subsequent Countryside Agency 2000 LCA Guidance.
- European Landscape Convention – definition of landscape as perceived by people

An important point to consider is that AONB is legally defined as 'natural beauty' whereas all documents and guidance for AONBs refer to 'landscape and landscape character'.

Receptors of change e.g. 'the landscape' is the main thing to examine but this should also be thought about conversely in terms of instigators of change e.g. climate change pressures for renewable energy.

### **AFTERNOON SESSION**

The Group summarised the discussions from the Morning Session as follows:

- **Natural Beauty** and **Outstanding** are the key words
- The features for each AONB need to be defined – beginning with a long list – sub divided as appropriate
- Do we use LCAs? – yes but only as part of the evidence base for ‘natural beauty’
- Can we measure and monitor each feature? May depend on resources available
- Which features matter?
- A baseline is required before targets or trajectory of change can be set
- Parameters for acceptable change (criteria) can be established
- How to measure change
- How to analyse and present
- How to present – e.g. State of AONBs report
- How to involve local communities to find out what people value in natural beauty

The Group suggested talking through a worked example to help understand how to undertake the above.

For example – Bodmin Moor – first task is to ‘Define features for each AONB’:- i.e. features which contribute to the Outstanding Natural Beauty (the following definitions are taken from the ‘A Cornish Landscape’ document 1997 produced for the Countryside Commission.)

- Large scale rolling landform
- Granite outcrops/tors
- Many streams/small rivers
- Exposed open (unenclosed) (lack of trees)
- Some post 17<sup>th</sup> century enclosure – variety of field patterns
- Sense of wilderness/wildness (lack of development and climate – wild, remote, empty, harsh)
- Visible historic remains (inc. dry stone walls and hedges)
- Moorland and pasture and bog
- Poor soils
- Sparse settlement pattern/isolated farms
- Granite/slate materials on buildings
- Moorland fringe (enclosed)
- Individual features e.g. Jamaica Inn
- Dominant forces of nature
- High nature conservation value
- Cultural associations and inspirations – artists and Daphne Du Maurier

The current Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Landscape Character Study due to be completed at the end of March 2007 will be used to help define the features etc as in the list above for each of the 3 AONBs and each separate part of the AONBs as relevant i.e. the landscapes of the Cornwall AONB will need to be split up as the 12 areas are too different for just one list of indicators to be relevant. But, it was also agreed that other documentation that exists should also be used to extract information from for including in setting monitoring baseline data.

### **Attributes (indicators)**

Taking one of the features on the previous list, the Group then discussed the attributes (indicators) for it:-

***Enclosed Moorland Fringe***

- retained hedgerows
- retained pasture

However, the Group felt that doing lists for each individual feature would be too onerous and it was also felt that the list of features are not necessarily all features, but some are attributes. The Group agreed it would be better to re-visit the features list and simplify it by agreeing the 'key' features only.

***e.g. list revisited for Bodmin Moor – key features would be:***

- sense of wilderness
- enclosed landscape fringe
- depth of historic landscape influences
- open moorland
- isolated settlements/traditional vernacular
- (outstanding biodiversity interest)

**Attributes/Indicators**

1. Sense of wilderness – dark skies; absence of intrusive noise; lack of intrusive development; lack of small scale incremental 'urbanisation'
2. Open Moorland Character – mosaic of upland heath; grass moor; blanket bog; scrub; tors; clean watercourses; summer flow
3. Enclosed landscape fringe character – Hedgerows and field pattern, retained pasture

After completing all the attributes for all the key features, it then needs to be considered what is practical/measurable. Then consider the 'targets' for each. It was noted that Fixed Point Photography exercises and Parish Planning/Community exercises will provide some of the information.

**Next Steps:-**

Complete key features/attributes and targets/trends for each area of the 3 AONBs.  
Consider what is measurable/practical to be monitored.

For further information on the outcomes of this workshop, please contact

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